

## *DISCUSSION PAPER*

### **CALIFORNIA WORKING LANDS STEWARDSHIP ADVISORY COUNCIL** November 2005

#### **SUMMARY**

The Secretaries of the California Department of Food and Agriculture and California Resources Agency recommend the creation of a “Working Lands Stewardship Advisory Council.” The purpose of the proposed Council, a statewide stakeholder body, will be to advise the Secretaries on policies that advance the protection and stewardship of California’s working farms, forests, and range lands statewide.

#### **BACKGROUND**

California has approximately 43 million acres of private farm, forest, and rangeland. Multiple state, federal, and private programs support voluntary conservation of these “working lands” through mechanisms such as conservation easements, wildlife habitat enhancements, and soil and water conservation practices. However, the state lacks a central forum to address issues and opportunities across working lands conservation programs. Several examples of existing or prior efforts to coordinate and promote private lands stewardship and conservation illustrate the need:

- The Bay-Delta Public Advisory Committee’s (BDPAC) Working Landscapes Subcommittee was established in 2002 to advise BDPAC on implementing components of the CALFED Program that affect agricultural and other working lands. Its work has demonstrated the need for enhanced tools supporting voluntary protection and stewardship of working lands, but the Subcommittee is limited to the CALFED solution area, and will likely be taking a lesser role in CALFED implementation as the Program narrows its focus under current CALFED refocusing.
- The Resource Conservation Commission is authorized by the Public Resources Code to coordinate state and federal conservation programs by working locally through resource conservation districts, but has been inactive since the mid-1970’s.
- The Biodiversity Council, the State Board of Forestry, and the State Board of Food and Agriculture, among other state level councils and boards, touch upon the issue of private working lands stewardship; however, none make this issue a central focus of their work.

The Secretaries have evaluated their options to address the need for a statewide council to focus on working lands conservation issues. They recommend building on the work of the CALFED BDPAC Working Landscapes Subcommittee by creating the Working Lands Stewardship Advisory Council. Its proposed purpose and membership is summarized below.

#### **PROPOSAL**

**Purpose.** The purpose of the Council would be to advise the Secretaries on options to:

- Position California to garner more support from the Farm Bill to enhance the environmental and economic sustainability of its working lands;

- Advance a more cohesive state strategy for the application of policies and resources in support of the environmental and economic sustainability of California's working lands; and,
- Foster improved collaboration among local, state and federal agencies in support of the stewardship of privately owned working lands.

**Membership.** The proposed Council will be comprised of non-government members appointed to represent the breadth of experience in working lands conservation and stewardship in California. Membership would include both practitioners (farmers, ranchers and foresters) and partners (non-government organizations, conservationists and local government officials) with demonstrated interest and experience in reducing conflict over the management and conservation of working lands. Members will be chosen for their demonstrated knowledge, experience and vision. The Council will also have state and federal government agency members who will serve in an *ex officio* capacity. On the state side, this is proposed to include Cal-EPA. Membership would be limited to twenty-one, including the two Secretary co-chairs, three state and three federal agency members, and thirteen public stakeholder members. Other agencies and stakeholders will be invited to participate in discussions as appropriate. (*See attached proposed membership summary.*)

**Products.** The Council will be responsible for: (1) developing a shared position for California on the Conservation Title of the 2007 Farm Bill; (2) improving collaboration and appropriate coordination among the state and federal programs supporting working lands conservation and stewardship; (3) supporting new and enhanced conservation mechanisms (e.g., market opportunities); (4) supporting new research needed to support working lands stewardship.

**Structure.** Co-chaired by the two agency Secretaries, the Council will meet quarterly, with meetings open to public and agency participation. *Ad hoc* and standing committees will meet more frequently, and may seek appropriate advisors to provide expertise in developing policy options. On-going coordination with the California Bay-Delta Public Advisory Committee can be provided through a standing committee or through regular reporting or cross-membership as appropriate. Staffing will be provided by the California Department of Food and Agriculture and California Resources Agency.

**Next steps.** The Working Landscapes Subcommittee of BDPAC has provided input on the development of this proposal. The California Department of Food and Agriculture and California Resources Agency will continue to engage stakeholders and agencies in a discussion of the proposed Council. The Council is anticipated to be formed and active in early 2006.

## ***PROPOSED WORKING LANDS STEWARDSHIP ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP (21)***

### **Agency Ex Officio Membership – State (5)**

Secretary, Food and Agriculture, Co-Chair  
Secretary, Resources Agency, Co-Chair  
Director, Department of Fish and Game  
Director, Department of Conservation  
California Environmental Protection Agency

### **Agency Ex Officio Membership – Federal (3)**

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

### **Public Stakeholder Membership (13)**

Farmers, ranchers and forest landowners (minimum of seven)  
Practitioners/professionals knowledgeable of working lands conservation  
Local Government – counties, special districts, RCDs and agricultural commissioners  
Environmental and conservation interests

### Desired Public Membership Criteria

- Be a **recognized leader** in the conservation and environmental enhancement of working farms and ranches.
- **Represent multiple interests**, areas of expertise and stakeholder communities;
- Provide **regional representation** from across California to the extent practicable;
- Where possible, **link to key related state boards**, commissions and councils;
- **Active in respective industry** organizations or interest groups;
- Embrace a **collaborative approach** to problem-solving;
- **Are leaders** in their respective communities of interest/professions; and,
- Will be **active and engaged** in the activities of the Council.